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ABSTRACT

All types of school vandalism have a monetary cost, but they also have a social cost. Monetary costs are arrayed against social costs, giving four basic types of vandalism according to the major effects vandalism can have, regardless of motive. Prevention priorities should be established to control the two types of vandalism with high social cost, then vandalism with high monetary cost and low social cost. The least effort should be expended to control vandalism with both low monetary and social cost. Control strategies depend on controlling access to the school by making it a place that in some sense is continuously occupied by some form of human or mechanical presence that will deter or respond to the vandal. (Author/MLF)

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SEMINAR #1

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UNDERSTANDING VANDALISM*

With the other great school problem - "violence", "vandalism" has become the keynote problem of school security. Historically, many school security programs began with the need to respond to school vandalism. More recently, with shock and dismay, public agencies have begun to debate the twin problems of violence and vandalism in the American school. The skilled publicist who attempts to build support for a school security program learns quickly that lurid stories of vandalism will draw as many irate demands for "immediate" action as will horror stories of school violence.

The net effect of much of the current concern over school vandalism has been to leave school officials in a quandry as to what to do. Their anxiety is compounded even further by endless suggestions which, like a shot gun blast, tend to scatter and diffuse coherent efforts to control vandalism in school settings. The tendency has been to list every vandalism control program anyone has ever conceived, rather than to develop a logical strategy for dealing with vandalism.

*With the permission of the authors and publisher, this article has been adapted from the forthcoming book by S.D. Vestermark, Jr. and Peter D. Blauvelt, The Effective School Security Program (West Nyack, N.Y. and Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Parker Publishing Company and Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976).

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The never ending fascination in recounting incidents of vandalism points to another part of the difficulty of addressing the problem; as with other social problems, and more than many of us might want to admit, we have grown comfortably accustomed to being shocked and surprised by it. Vandalism is a convenient target for those who want to be outraged by what youth can do.

We need therefore to put aside the sensationalism associated with vandalism and begin to develop a rational approach for the understanding and controlling of vandalism.

Why schools are targeted by vandals. As a target for vandalism, schools share certain characteristics with other principal targets of the vandal: public housing facilities, parks, and mass transportation vehicles. First of all, school is a public place, which means that it has no particular owner, who can personally confront the vandal. It belongs to "everyone," so it is everyone's fair game. ("Public" need not always mean "publicly owned." Note that even in a residential private school, the classroom and non-dormitory facilities are "common" areas, where there may be little direct sense of ownership by the students.) Second, it has long periods when it is unoccupied, or when the human presence is reduced to negligible significance. (A janitor working in an obscure corner of a mammoth high school is just as helpless to stop vandals as is the worried mother spying graffiti artists at work from the tenth floor of her public flat.) Third, it is a secular place, which means that there are no religious and few moral scruples about damaging or destroying it. In spite of a few dramatic incidents of defacement directed against minority churches and cemeteries, these places remain largely immune to vandals.

Summing it up, schools are made to order arenas for the vandals. In many areas they are the only easily accessible public, secular, and frequently unoccupied places. The fact that they are schools -- places of enforced learning, discipline, and socialization -- only reinforces their attractiveness as targets for the vandals. Schools will always be viewed by some young people as places where they are forced to do things they don't want to do. Thus, the potential vandal can always rationalize vandalism against his school, or any school, as an act of revenge.

Make the school "occupied." The job of controlling vandalism begins, then, in recognizing what can and can not be done to change the basic traits of schools. Most schools must always remain public and secular. The one trait that can be extensively modified is the degree to which a school building is unoccupied and, therefore, vulnerable to vandalism. The key to controlling vandalism is to make the school a place that in some sense is continuously occupied by some form of human or mechanical presence which will deter or respond to the vandal. The heart of any effective approach to controlling vandalism will be establishing that sense of "presence" which defines the building as no longer being an inert target.

The concept of "social cost." Most studies of vandalism emphasize those costs which can be measured in direct monetary terms. Not only are the monetary costs staggering and highly visible, but they are relatively easy to assign. Vandalism has another critical dimension, however: its impact in social terms, on individuals and groups. It is very hard to put a price tag on this kind of cost, but in some cases the costs are far more important, not only in estimating the damage, but in developing a strategy to cope with vandals.

How do you assign a dollar value to the total impact on an educational program, when vandals destroy fifty microscopes? What price do you set when a child sees the carnage left by vandals who have mutilated pet hamsters in the classroom? How much money do you put in your budget to cover the disruption that results when one group's personal belongings are systematically vandalized by another group -- and then the brawls begin? Although there is some monetary cost in each case, that is not the real damage. The real damage is to the process of acquiring knowledge, to the individual and his or her capacities to feel and imagine, and to the abilities of people in groups to work together harmoniously in school.

Granted that the concept can be more difficult to define than assigning monetary values, we think that the social cost of vandalism has three major components. First, it is the damage to the educational program, ranging from hours lost from instruction to the more subtle notion that because of the damage done, course content had to be redefined and education opportunities lost. Second, is the psychological impact on students and adults. Third, is the disruptive influence on group and intergroup relations. Since the social costs of vandalism may be difficult to estimate and since they may have different effects on different segments of the school community, the school security administrator and educator must be especially sensitive to how these costs may be expressed in behavior and attitudes -- and prepared to respond effectively to the needs expressed through behavior and attitudes.

Impact upon the educational program. By and large, most serious acts of vandalism in monetary terms will also have great impact upon the educational program. Vandals who destroy a school's library, who throw paint on walls, floors, and equipment, who stop up sinks and flood a school, who

destroy audio-visual equipment, who disable the school's heating plant in the winter, have all committed acts which have a high monetary cost as well as highly disruptive impacts on the planned educational program. Sometimes, school must be closed for an appreciable period.

Psychological impact. While the above acts have some psychological impact upon students and teachers, there are other acts of vandalism which have a greater psychological impact, even though the monetary costs are much less. Acts which fall into this category include mutilation of classroom pets or laboratory animals, the systematic destruction of student projects, human excrement left in a teacher's desk drawer, and the repeated destruction of a teacher's personal belongings. The intent of these acts is often to frighten and intimidate younger students and to cause anger and resentment among older students and teachers.

Group impact. There are certain acts of vandalism which are directed toward identifiable groups of students in a school. Groups may be victimized because of their race, socio-economic backgrounds, geographic location, social attitudes, or life styles. The vandals select as their targets property or school projects which are easily identified with one or more groups. Typical acts include the vandalizing of an American Indian art display, a display of Mexican-American crafts, or a project which depicts the contributions of Blacks to American culture. They also include vandalism to property of students who come from one geographic section of the community, or the "trashing" of students' lockers who have different life styles or who express certain unpopular social attitudes. These types of incidents generally have a low monetary cost, yet the disruptive impact on a student body can be enormous. Fights, student protests, and even the carrying of weapons can be among the social effects of these acts of vandalism.

Relationships Between Monetary Costs and Social Costs

An approach to managing the vandalism problem. Monetary Costs and Social Costs are two broad variables for assessing the impact of vandalism. When properly examined in relation to each other, these variables give important insight about how to approach the vandalism problem as one of school security management. Indeed, they point to a procedure for evaluating any acts of vandalism and setting priorities for preventing them or responding to them.

If you will reflect over the whole range of possible acts of vandalism, you will see a critical fact: that vandalism can be high on one cost variable while low on another. For example, a school safe can be blown open or a cherry bomb dropped down a toilet. While the costs are high in Monetary terms, it is relatively easy for life to go on in school, and there is little Social Cost. Turning the relationship between Monetary and Social Costs around: a few cents worth of spray paint can write "SCREW NIGGERS" across a school wall -- and start a mass disruption which closes school. Some acts of vandalism can be high on both cost variables: kids can wreck the central office area of school, ruining equipment and valuable records. Not only is the Monetary damage great in terms of replacement costs and labor, but all educational functions which depend on the school's records must be at least temporarily suspended or redirected. And -- there are acts of vandalism which are low on both cost variables. These include the single broken window, whose tinkle maddens only the principal. They can include those wrought by the drag racer on the school parking lot, who cuts across a wet lawn, leaving ugly tire tracks.

These relationships between Monetary Cost and Social Cost can be expressed more formally. Figure 1, page 8, presents a simple matrix, in which Monetary Costs are arrayed against Social Costs, giving four basic Types of Vandalism. Type I Vandalism is High on both cost variables. Type II Vandalism is High on Monetary Cost but Low on Social Cost. Type III Vandalism is Low on Monetary Cost but High on Social Cost. Type IV Vandalism is Low on both Monetary and Social Cost. In passing, we should not that there is a certain apparent decrease in the severity of a given act of vandalism, from Type I, which is the most costly vandalism, to Type IV, which is the least costly. (Even this progression probably doesn't hold, as will be suggested in a moment.) Beyond this, the Roman numeral values have no meaning. We wanted to assign numbers and not fancy typological names to each Type, because we think a great deal of time has been wasted by students of vandalism, who have attempted to discern in different types of vandalism something about the motives of vandals and possible preventive strategies based on these motives.

Our purpose is to provide a compact typing of the major effects vandalism can have, regardless of motive. This is the real issue in managing vandalism -- examining possible or actual effects, and seeing what deterrent or remedial actions can feasibly be taken.

Classifying acts of vandalism by Type. The four Types of vandalism presented here classify an act of vandalism by its effects, as the essential first step in learning how to manage these effects. Because Monetary and Social Costs may vary independently of each other, the final judgment about how to classify a particular act of vandalism will often require lumping together different sorts of measures and estimates, to reach the final decision about how tc classify a given act.

Figure - 1

TYPES OF VANDALISM

SOCIAL COST

MONETARY COST	HIGH	LOW
HIGH	**Type I Vandalism** Incidents having both a high monetary cost as well as a high social cost. **EXAMPLES:** 1. Destruction of school media center. 2. Destruction of school records. 3. Vandalism which closes the school.	**Type II Vandalism** Incidents having a high monetary cost but a low social cost. **EXAMPLES:** 1. Large number of broken windows. 2. Cherry bomb dropped in a toilet. 3. Vandalism to vending machines.
LOW	**Type III Vandalism** Incidents having a low monetary cost but a high social cost. **EXAMPLES:** 1. Racial graffiti. 2. Systematic vandalizing of minority-owned property. 3. Killing of classroom animals.	**Type IV Vandalism** Incidents having both a low monetary cost as well as a low social cost. **EXAMPLES:** 1. Tire tracks in the lawn. 2. Cutting of the flagpole rope. 3. Painting of names on the bleachers. 4. Single broken window.

This could get very complicated very quickly. The methodologist could have a field day pointing out the different "incommensurables" in the matrix of Types. The immediate goal here is really quite modest. We think that by looking at all acts of school vandalism in terms of these four Types, we can point the school security manager toward some real priorities in how to respond to potential or actual effects of vandalism. <u>These response priorities</u> may be, in fact, quite different from the priorities that many administrators now have. It is very easy, if one is a hardpressed administrator, to look at an act of vandalism which is obviously costly in Monetary terms, and throw many valuable resources into its immediate repair. Meanwhile, the cheap little act of racial graffiti which the administrator ignored has started a gang fight in the cafeteria, with the result that school closes, and thousands of man hours of time are lost from education. That little bit of graffiti turned out to be far more "expensive" than the more obvious "costly" damages.

Before considering how the Types point toward some new response priorities in dealing with vandalism, let's try to define the Types as sharply as possible, through some concrete cases. Remember that in classifying an act of vandalism, there are certain questions of situation and magnitude which may complicate whatever judgment you have to make. Local values can be very important. In most settings, a single broken window is an act of Type IV Vandalism. (Granted, some schools may be so "up tight" that this one window is a big issue -- but the problem, then, really is not one of vandalism, but of dealing with the Captain Queeg who runs the principal's office.) Yet, <u>fifty</u> broken windows may be Type II Vandalism -- if your budget for repairs is tight. <u>Five hundred</u> broken windows may be Type I, requiring closing the school.

Furthermore, it will always be hard to assess individual psychological costs against any other cost criterion. Is emotional damage to one child at seeing a disfigured pet hamster less costly than a hole knocked in the side of the school when all the kids were home in bed? Is the quickly erased, Type IV graffiti which one kid happened to see less costly, in the long run, than the graffiti which stayed on for a time and had Type III effects, because it triggered a riot or walkout?

Obviously, then, we are not presenting a classification scheme which is free from serious questions of judgment. Used in the right way, however, it can be helpful.

Developing Strategies for Controlling Vandalism

What are the Basic Objectives?

Setting priorities. If you had unlimited material resources, then this discussion of Types or a further discussion of strategies would be of little interest. You could simply buy whatever you needed to replace whatever was lost. If the vandals bulldoze down the entire school! If children have been emotionally damaged, intervene with therapeutic resources and help them to adjust.

The typical administrator concerned with school security has a much different prospect. Pressures are mounting all across the school budget. As vandalism increases, what kind of strategy will lead to maximum success in controlling vandalism and its effects? Can one establish priorities, such that if a system experienced many different types of vandalism, it can focus on an approach which is likely to deal with all important Types? Could one

find an approach which will deal with the most serious Type, and still have effects on other Types.

Even with unlimited material resources, the idea that vandalism has a Social Cost suggests that finding the right vandalism strategy is much more than laying out money and material resources. Increasingly, vandalism control strategies will need to consider very carefully the relationship between Monetary and Social Costs. At first glance, those planning a vandalism control program might conclude that the program ought to deal with all four Types of vandalism in the priority given in Table - 1. This list assumes, sometimes not incorrectly, that the greater the Monetary Cost, the greater the priority for control, because Monetary Costs are the "real" costs, or, at the least, a good indicator of all costs of vandalism. This issue could, by the way, make an interesting research study.

Table - 1

APPARENT PRIORITIES IN A
VANDALISM CONTROL PROGRAM

Priority

1.	Type I	(Monetary Cost:	HIGH	Social Cost:	HIGH)
2.	Type II	(Monetary Cost:	HIGH	Social Cost:	LOW)
3.	Type III	(Monetary Cost:	LOW	Social Cost:	HIGH)
4.	Type IV	(Monetary Cost:	LOW	Social Cost:	LOW)

We suspect that in most school systems today, the real priorities in a vandalism control program do not rank-order easily from I to IV. In most systems undergoing rapid change and experiencing severe budgetary problems, we suspect that the real priorities are as listed in Table - 2. The placement of Types I and IV on this list doesn't require much discussion. Type I

Vandalism very likely closes a school, and it must be repaired to have school reopen. Thus, its prevention is a high priority. Type IV is, at best, trivial, and too much time spent worrying about it wastes what resources are available for more urgent matters. The real issue is the placement of Type II below Type III. It may well be that in a financially constrained system, some acts of Type II vandalism should only be patched. In the short run, it may in fact be wasteful to repair them. School goes on, in spite of some ugliness and inconvenience. In contrast, Type III vandalism can sometimes close a school, even if little Monetary Cost has been incurred. So, we are suggesting that the key to most vandalism control programs today will be not whether Monetary Costs can be limited by prevention and detection systems, but, rather, whether the program will keep schools open and functioning, through controlling Social Costs, until such time as additional Monetary resources become available.

Table - 2

REAL PRIORITIES IN A VANDALISM CONTROL PROGRAM FOR A CHANGING, BUDGETARILY CONSTRAINED SYSTEM

Priority					
1.	Type I	(Monetary Cost:	HIGH	Social Cost:	HIGH)
2.	Type III	(Monetary Cost:	LOW	Social Cost:	HIGH)
3.	Type II	(Monetary Cost:	HIGH	Social Cost:	LOW)
4.	Type IV	(Monetary Cost:	LOW	Social Cost:	LOW)

Hopefully, the issue will seldom be as starkly posed as this. If you develop a program to control Types I and III, you should have markedly increased the prospect of controlling Type II acts. But the day may well be coming when a system, faced with both limited resources and disruptions flowing from Type III vandalism, must be prepared to divert part of its resources

with the explicit objective of limiting Type III's Social Costs through inhibiting Type III vandalism. For example, plans to install an alarm system in every school may need to be deferred. Instead, selected, troubled schools may require both alarms and specially trained patrols or school residents, who can prevent or quickly deal with Socially costly vandalism. In making this decision, the system may be deliberately deciding to accept a certain level of Type II losses.

Controlling access and time. Let's not get too gloomy too quickly. Remember, to control any act of vandalism there are certain clearcut, constant things you must do. You must make the school a place that in some sense is continuously occupied by some form of human or mechanical presence which will deter or respond to the vandal. The requirement for this continuous presence comes from the fact that two basic variables control the ability of a vandal to commit his act of vandalism. These variables are one, access to the target, and two, time to commit the act. The best approach to controlling vandalism would be to limit both access and time for each of the four Types.

To commit each Type of vandalism, the vandal must have access and time. Therefore, a high payoff strategy for controlling vandalism would limit access and time across all Types. In practice, such a strategy is nearly impossible to design. A system for limiting access to school at night may not work during the day time. Thus, while an effective burglar alarm will keep vandals from having sufficient time to commit one Type of vandalism, they might find sufficient time to commit another Type when the alarms are turned off.

Objectives of effective strategies. Generally put then, strategies for controlling vandalism should have these objectives:

1. Ideally they should limit the time and access required to commit all four Types.

2. At a minimum, they should limit time and access to control the more costly Types which, depending upon the situation, may include Types II and III, as well as Type I.

3. Where possible, they should limit both social and monetary costs.

4. In schools or systems where Type III Social Costs are potentially more critical than Type II Costs, special resources should be directed to preventing and limiting Type III effects.

5. By and large, they should view attempts to control Type IV vandalism as ineffectual. Probably the only effective response to Type IV vandalism is to get rid of its effects quickly. If there is the ability to do so, and if Type IV vandalism is the main problem, then a program of peer group rewards and punishments may be attempted.